

Waiting for the Bridegroom
Sunday Pentecost 23, Year A
Amos 5: 18 – 24; 1 Thessalonians 4: 13 – 18; Matthew 25: 1 – 13
November 8, 2020

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

There was a show I used to watch, it was rather silly. It was ‘very’ loosely based on a comic book and cartoon series. It had a couple of aliens, a super hero and a bunch of, like I said, silly stuff. But, it is something that one of the silly aliens said, that I want to bring to your attention. It was about love. It is interesting how different people describe love, marriage, and all things ‘romantic’. Some are crude. Some are shy. Some are insulting. Some are silly. This one is silly, *“Love is a happy time. It’s when the male part of the species goes to the female part of the species and says, ‘Hey, would you like to go on a date?’ And, she says, ‘Yes, I’d like to go on a date.’ And, so, they go to some place called a restaurant and he orders a big piece of beef, that he eats. And, she orders something called a salad. That, to me ladies and gentlemen, is love. Kind of makes you want to cry, doesn’t it?”* I told you it was silly.

Yet, I bring all this up, because our Gospel reading today has to uses the imagery if marriage and love to make a point.

But, before we jump into the reading itself, I think it is necessary to talk about this biblical social construct, called marriage.

You may not know this, but many of the things that are associated with a ‘Christian’ marriage did not derive from Christianity. If you know your Church and Biblical history, you know that the early Christians did not consider themselves anything other than Jews. They were simply Jews who recognized Jesus as the promised Messiah, the fulfillment of Jewish prophecy. This is why Sts. Peter and Paul would always go and preach in the synagogues first, whenever they would arrive in a town. There would be their fellow Jews, and they would tell them of

Jesus and how He fulfilled all the Jewish Law and Prophets. Some would believe, others wouldn't. Some would welcome them; others would force them out or try to kill them.

Yet, while our worship today is strongly patterned after the Jewish synagogue worship that the Apostles and early church witnessed and adapted, our marriage ceremonies aren't patterned after Jewish rites and rituals, really at all.

Instead, they are patterned more after another strong influence on the early Christian Church; pagan Rome.

Things like, exchanging rings, exchanging vows, kissing the bride, and even having a marriage ceremony in a place of worship all came to us from the pagan Romans, not Judaism. This doesn't mean these things are wrong. They are all meaningful. They have been 'Christianized' and make marriage a very celebratory and momentous occasion for the whole church.

But, for us to understand this parable of Jesus with the 10 virgins waiting for the bridegroom, we cannot look to our own marriage practices and influences. Instead, we have to go back to our Jewish heritage. And, to do this, we go into a foreign realm. A place where marriage is something different than what we have been taught, or as is reflected by silly aliens.

In the Jewish world, there was no dating. There was no eHarmony. There was mom and dad. That's right, mom and dad would pick who you would marry. In our world, we would say, no way! I would only marry someone I love. You silly Romans.

Biblically, marriage came first, and love grew from there. Most Jews, especially young ladies, would marry in their mid teens. Mom and dad, in their wisdom, had already selected the best candidate, and talked with their parents. Arrangements would be made. The bridegroom's

parents would give money to the father of the bride to compensate him for the loss of part of his household. This was called the ‘mohar.’

Sometimes, her parents would give her part of the mohar, to help her set up her new household. This was called the ‘mattan’, or dowry.

The two young people would be brought together and would be ‘betrothed’. This is where the story of Mary and Joseph begins. If you remember, Mary ends up pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Joseph is troubled and contemplates divorcing her, even though they had not yet been actually married.

Betrothal was a legal binding contractual agreement. In order to get out of it, he would have had to have legally divorced her. And, that was exactly what he considered doing. Thankfully, he didn’t. Otherwise, Scripture would not have been fulfilled, because Jesus would not have been born in Joseph’s hometown of Bethlehem. So, Joseph was important to the fulfillment of Scripture, the raising of the Godchild, and the protection and care of his family.

So, once a couple was betrothed, the bridegroom would then begin building a home for him and his soon to be bride. Many times, the new home, was built onto his parents home.

Jesus uses Jewish marriage imagery A LOT. Remember when He said, *“In My Father’s house are many rooms.... I go to prepare a place for you.... If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself”* (Jn 14:2–3). He was speaking as the Bridegroom to His Bride, the Church...you and me.

You are His betrothed. You have been sealed as His own in the waters of Holy Baptism. The same Holy Spirit that came upon Mary and gave to her the Christ child, came to you in those precious waters and gave Christ to you. You are the betrothed of Jesus.

So, in our reading today, we have the 10 virgins. They are waiting for the bridegroom to come and collect his bride. They do not know when he is coming. They just know that he is. And, so, they do their best to be ready. They make preparations, they get their lamps, and they go out and wait.

They watched, for the bridegroom. He would be hard to miss as there would be something of a parade. He would be dressed in wedding garments, possibly riding on litter, as his friends accompanied him. The bride's maids, the 10 virgins, would go and call the bride and they would escort her out to meet him. They did not want to miss him and let down their friend.

Yet, five of these young women were not as prepared as they should have been. They did not have enough oil to keep their lamps lit. They ask to borrow some from the others, who deny their request saying, "*Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves*" (Mt. 25:9).

Yet, while they were gone, the bridegroom came. Those who had been prepared went in to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. "*Watch therefore,*" says Jesus, "*for you know neither the day nor the hour.*"

As Lutheran Christians, we do not look for 'the signs of the times'. Our goal is not to look for when Jesus, our bridegroom, will be coming. Our goal is simply this, to be ready when He does.

We should not be caught off guard, because we should be ready. We wait... impatiently... but, we wait. We wait... excitedly... as, we wait. We wait... full of hope... yet, we wait. Like 5 young girls, waiting for the young man to come over the hill with his friends to collect his beloved... we wait.

But, God hasn't left us just to wait for Him to come again and take us to Himself. He has given us gifts, a dowry, if you will.

When we come to church, it is an exercise in our preparedness. It is filling our lamp with oil. It is filling our hearts with faith, it is basking in the promises of our Savior. It shows our eager anticipation for the arrival of our bridegroom.

And, He gives us gifts; His Word read, taught and preached. Spoken by you and me. We speak it to each other, we speak it God and it is spoken to us. We are communicating with our Bridegroom.

We remember our baptism; the betrothal contract. We remind ourselves to whom we belong. We remember who has claimed us and made us His own. He promises to never leave us. He promises to protect us. He has even laid down His life so that we may have life, and have it abundantly.

He gives to us a foretaste of the marriage feast in His kingdom that has no end. In it, He not only gives us the gifts of faith and forgiveness, but He gives to us Himself. He is not absent. It is not simply a memorial meal. It is a feast on and with our Bridegroom.

In all of these things, and more, He shows us that He is truly present, that His gifts are real, that His love for you is real.

And, when we have all of that, it is easy for us to be prepared. To wait expectantly, joyously, excitedly... It is easy for us to fill our lamps with oil, because, every Sunday, He does the filling. We don't have to go looking for it anywhere else. It is right here. Just for you.

And, that, to me ladies and gentlemen, is love. Kinda makes you want to cry, doesn't it?

Now may the peace that passes all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.